

Diablo Honors.....

Robin Soule

By Dee and Tony Geisler

Robin Soule, granddaughter of Robert Noble Burgess, founder in 1914 of what is now Diablo Country Club, was born at Children's Hospital in San Francisco in 1958. Her mother, Suzanne Burgess Soule, was born the old fashioned way at her home in Diablo. Her father, Edward Lee Soule, worked for his family's business, the Soule Steel Company. Robin's family came to Diablo on weekends, holidays and summers. Her mother would pick up her and her siblings on Friday after school in San Francisco and stay in Diablo until early Monday morning. Her dad loved being in Diablo and told her, "Robin, working hard on the Sky Farm puts the rest of the week right."

When she was 14, she and her mother moved permanently to "horse friendly" Diablo where they kept many horses and took rides up the mountain. At that time, Caballo Ranchero Drive had ranchettes with horses and other animals next to the open ranch land of Mount Diablo. Robin's present home was built for army reservists working in Benicia in the 1940s. Her mom bought the home for \$400. Robin's dad moved the house from Benicia, reinforced it and put in bigger windows so that their mom could keep track of their five children.



*R.N Burgess, founder
of Diablo*



*Back: Ron Yetner, Julie Soule Yetner (sister), Edward Lee Soule Jr (dad), Peter Soule (brother)
Front: Sisters Annastel, Susan and Robin Soule*

As the youngest, Robin mimicked her older siblings. At age 7 she was not allowed to ride Billy, a tall Shetland cross pony which was known to buck. Unaware that her mother was watching, she grabbed a halter and rope, jumped on Billy and was quickly bucked off. She jumped back on and off she went. Soon, her mother opened the kitchen window to tell her to stop riding him, but Robin stayed on top of Billy. In "ranching style," Mrs. Soule often told her children to "look out," but never, "no".

Riding horses for Robin began by straddling "Shawnee" on a Western saddle at age 3 and sitting in front of her dad. As she grew older, she remembers riding a pony to the Milk Barn to collect the mail and tying her pony to a hitching post. That's when Robin decided she wanted to train horses and become a nurse when she grew up. She learned horse management and was hired as a trainer in a variety of locations including Soltau's Arabians in Danville. She also studied nursing and has spent many years working in the health field.

Robin sometimes took Swingable, an ex-racehorse, for an early ride up Alameda Diablo to the trail head. Diablo residents loved to see a horse and rider and would slow or even stop their cars to watch them. George Pacini, their neighbor who owned a ranchette nearby, was an amazing sight on his big white horse with a beautiful Western saddle. He loved the land and would often walk to the Soule's fence line to talk about old times.

Once the Soule's brand new filly lost its balance and rolled down the hill onto George's property. Seeing her, he put her into his buckboard station wagon and carried her back to their property. One of the mares saw the filly and seemed to be jumping for joy. Mom and baby were reunited, thanks to George's sharp eyes.



Robin training a horse using a technique called long lining

Robin stayed to live with her mom on 65 acres in Diablo enjoying the panoramic view, although their home was sometimes the recipient of very strong winds. Mrs. Soule contracted polio during the great polio epidemic in the late 40s. Even though the doctors told Suzanne that this wasn't a good idea, she gave birth to Julie and, later to Robin so Julie would have a playmate. Because of Suzanne's polio, in later years, she needed Robin's help, so Robin worked as a nurse at night which gave her time during the day to assist her mom. The children helped Mrs. Soule with a vegetable garden from which they gathered produce to sell to Diablo Foods in Danville. Mrs. Soule loved to see Robin trim the horses' feet and fix a fence or a water trough. The Soules would often stop to see wild animals passing near their home to spend the night in Diablo below.

Nearby Diablo residents who were especially kind to Robin and Mrs. Soule were Ginny Rei, her son Dave and Jim Stone. The Reis gave her much emotional support during the hard years of working outside the home and caring for her mom during happy and sad times. Jim Stone, "quite a gentleman," would come up often to see Mrs. Soule who enjoyed reminiscing with him because of his love for the area and his extraordinary knowledge of history.

There have been noticeable changes in Robin's many years living on the hill above Diablo. When she first moved here, the old incandescent lights in sleepy nighttime Diablo didn't dim the sight of the star-studded sky, and her family enjoyed seeing these stars which seemed to hang down like pendants. Today, the LED lights dim the stars, and three miles away the ball field lights blind her eyes at night. There is much more traffic and noise from construction, leaf blowers, mulch machines, radios

Mrs. Soule and Robin loved going to the Diablo Country Club where they heard the band that would play in the patio by the pool. Robin has enjoyed living at the base of the mountain and is grateful that she has been able to continue her passions in life by retraining horses so they can have a new life and, at this time, helping elderly people to gain health and independence.



And, Robin, we are grateful to you for your lifelong devotion to Diablo, to helping other humans and horses, and for sharing your story.

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